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## TOTEMISM IN CALIFORNIA<sup>1</sup>

By C. HART MERRIAM

That totemism exists among the Indians of California seems to have escaped the notice of ethnologists. This may be due to the less conspicuous part it plays in the lives of the people compared with its high development in some other regions, notably Alaska and British Columbia. Nevertheless totemism not only exists in California, but is rather widely prevalent; it is present in many tribes — tribes distributed among widely different stocks; and, when one comes to understand something of the inner life of the people, it is found to be as deeply rooted, and in some cases as important, as in other regions.

It is not my object to discuss the subject totemism, but to record the widespread prevalence among California Indians of certain totemic beliefs and practices which, apparently, have not been previously observed. And it is interesting to note that of the several degrees and phases of totemism, at least three occur in California, namely: (1) The non-hereditary *individual totem*; (2) the hereditary *patriarchal totem*; and (3) the hereditary *matriarchal clan totem*.

I am aware that some ethnologists would restrict the use of the term totemism to the class of cases ordinarily known as *clan totemism*; but clan totemism is so obviously only a higher development of *personal totemism* that such restriction would seem hardly to serve a useful purpose.

In California the totem is always an object in nature — usually an animal, but sometimes a tree or a rock.

Among the several tribes of Mewan stock totemism forms a fundamental part of the religion, and throughout life is a controlling

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<sup>1</sup> Read before a joint meeting of the Anthropological Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Anthropological Association, and the American Folk-Lore Society, in New York City, December 27, 1906; and briefly noticed in the *American Anthropologist*, vol. 9, p. 168, Jan.-Mar., 1907.

factor in the conduct of the people. The form it takes varies greatly. Thus among the Southern Mewuk (Mewwah) it governs marriage and the choice of partners in games, and also determines the placing and treatment of visitors; while among the Northern Mewuk, where its power over the individual is even more marked, no such social restrictions exist.

In the Middle and Southern Mewuk the totem is hereditary and passes from father to child; the mother's totem is not carried down. If the father is a Deer, all the children — boys and girls alike — are Deer.

In the Northern Mewuk on the other hand the totem is individual, not hereditary. The father may be a Bear, the son a Gray Tree-squirrel, the grandson a Lizard, the aunt a Yellowjacket Wasp. In reply to inquiries as to how one finds out what his totem is, I was told that a young person, on reaching the age of puberty, goes off alone in the forest and wanders for days without food — save such green stuff and roots as he may gather and eat raw. He wanders *hang'-e-lah* (like a lost man) for a period which may last for two weeks. After a time, when asleep, he sees the animal he came from; it or its spirit comes to him and brings him food. After this he goes home but says nothing about what has happened. If on the first or second night it again appears and brings him food, he lives, and throughout life it befriends him; but if it does not come to him and he eats cooked food, he dies.

In this tribe — the Northern Mewuk — the totem may be an animal, a tree, or a rock. The commonest animal totems are the Bear, Deer, Raccoon, Gray Tree-squirrel, Golden Eagle, Lizard,<sup>1</sup> and Yellowjacket Wasp. Certain animals are never totems. Conspicuous among these are the Coyote and Fox. The only tree totem is the Black Oak.

My list of Northern Mewuk totems is only fragmentary and does not include the Great Horned Owl; but a member of the tribe once told me a story which at least implies that this owl is one of them. He said: "One winter a few years ago a sick man near Oleta was on his way home when he fell and could not get up. He lay there

<sup>1</sup> The Northern Mewuk have two Lizard totems: *Pe-lā'-lit-te* the Little Lizard, and *Suk'-kā-de* the Black Lizard.

on the ground all night. It was a cold winter night and he would have frozen to death, but *Too-koo'-le* the big Owl saw him and came and lay down on his breast and spread his wings over him and stayed there all night, keeping the man's *wus'ke* (heart) warm and saving his life."

Among the Middle and Southern Mewuk the totem may be either an animal or a tree, but never a rock—in which latter respect they differ from the Northern Mewuk, many of whom came from rocks. If a tree, it must be either the Black Oak or the Sugar Pine, as these are the only trees from which people ever came. The most usual totems are: the Grizzly Bear (but no other bear), Coyote, Deer, Gray Tree-squirrel, Bat, a considerable number of birds, the small lizard called *Pe'-chik-kah*, the Frog, the water Salamander, the Salmon, and the Yellowjacket Wasp. These people say they never came from the Elk, Black Bear, Mountain Lion, Bobcat, Raccoon, Big Wolf, Fox, Badger, Otter, Shunk, Marten, Ringtail Civet (*Bassariscus*), Porcupine, Groundhog, Ground Squirrel, Chipmunk, Rabbits, Rats, Mice, Gopher, Mole, certain birds, Snakes, the larger Lizards, the Toad, Fish (except the Salmon), or insects (except the Yellowjacket Wasp).

Among the Middle and Southern Mewuk the people group themselves in two great classes or "sides"—the Land Side and the Water Side—designated respectively by the names of characteristic land and water animals. Thus among the Middle Mewuk, *Oó'-yah* the Deer stands for the people of the Land Side; *Lo'-tah* the Frog for those of the Water Side. Similarly, among the Southern Mewuk, *Ti'-es-moo* the California Bluejay stands for the Land Side, and *O-sā'-le* the Coyote for the Water Side.<sup>1</sup> Even to-day, in some parts of Southern Mewuk territory, the first question a strange Indian (speaking the same language) is asked, is, *Man-nan'-ne Ti'-es-moo*, *O-sā'-le*? (Who are you, Bluejay or Coyote?). His reply determines the place assigned him and his subsequent relations and treatment. In love affairs and marriage, and also in games,

<sup>1</sup> That the Coyote, a land animal, should have been chosen to represent the Water Side seems strange at first, but is understood when the *oot'ne* or mythology of the tribe is known, for in the beginning Coyote-man came out of, or from beyond, the sea. This aquatic assignment of Coyote does not affect his near relatives the Dog and Fox, both of whom are classed on the Land Side.

the partners must belong to opposite sides. The Northern Mewuk do not have this custom, but use the direct terms, *Kik'-kü-mud'-de*, water side, and *Wal'-le-mud'-de*, land side. The Middle and Southern Mewuk who came from trees (Black Oak and Sugar Pine) were classed naturally on the Land Side.

The three tribes of Mewan stock living north of San Francisco bay are ardent totemists, but the full details of their beliefs are not known. The *O-lā'-yo-me* of Coyote valley on Putah creek say that they came from the Bear, Deer, Coyote, Gray Tree-squirrel, Ground Squirrel, Owls and a few other birds, but not from the Raccoon, Fox, Duck Hawk, Crow, Bluejay, Meadowlark, or Woodpecker. Their totem is hereditary on the father's side, and appears to be called *O'-ke-ap'-po*.

The *Hoo'-koo-e'-ko* of the coast region immediately north of San Francisco bay, and the *Olamentko* of Bodega bay, say that every person was once a bird, and that they came from Owls, Eagles, Hawks, Quails, Ducks (the Mallard in particular), Bluejays, Woodpeckers, and some other kinds. But no *Hookoeko* or *Olamentko* ever came from any mammal. This is a highly important feature in which the two coast tribes agree among themselves and differ from the related *Olā'yome* of Coyote valley.

The tribes of Midoo stock also came from animals. The *No-tó-koi-yo*, or Northeastern Midoo, state that they came from various birds and mammals; and the *Pā'-we-nan*, or Southwestern Midoo, have the same belief. These people, the *Pā'-we-nan*, appear to call their totems *Kaht'-dik-kah*. They are the Deer, Antelope, Wolf, Coyote, Fox, Mountain Lion, Raccoon, Skunk, Beaver, Rabbits (three kinds — Jackrabbits, Cottontails, and Brush Rabbits), Ground Squirrel, Gopher, White-footed Mouse, Bald Eagle, the large buzzard hawks of the genus *Buteo*, the Duck Hawk, Condor, Turkey Buzzard, Great Horned Owl, Raven, Crow, Valley Quail, California Bluejay, Meadowlark, Flicker, Blackbird, Pelican, Cormorant, White Goose, Swan, Great Blue Heron, Kildee, Lizard, and Salmon. The *Pā'-we-nan* did not come from Elk, Bears, Wild Cat, Badger, Otter (there is doubt about the Otter), Gray Tree-squirrel, Wood Rat, Ducks, Divers (Grebes), Gulls, Mudhen, Sandhill Crane, Gray Goose, Canada Goose, Barn Owl, Ground or Burrowing Owl,

Pigeon, Dove, Roadrunner, Kingfisher, Magpie, California Woodpecker, Robin, Swallow, Hummingbird, Turtle, Frog, Snakes, Sturgeon, or Sucker; neither did any of them come from insects or trees.

It is interesting to note that with the *Pā'-we-nan*, as with the Southern Mewuk already mentioned, the totem is hereditary and descends from father to children of both sexes.

Passing south to the Yokut stock of the Southern Sierra foot-hills, totemism is present in some and probably all of the tribes. In the *Kosh-sho'-o* tribe of Table mountain, on the south side of the San Joaquin river, it is more highly developed than noted elsewhere. An old woman of this tribe told me that *Yi'-yil* the Falcon was her family or clan totem — the totem of her mother and her mother's



FIG. 122. — *Kosh-sho'-o* basket with *Yi'-yil* (Falcon) design.

mother and so on back, for in this tribe mother right prevails and the line of descent carries the mother's totem instead of the father's. This woman showed me two baskets, made by her mother and grandmother, on which the clan totem, *Yi'-yil*, is represented by a symbol

consisting of two parallel oblique bars, which stand for the two dark bars on the side of the Falcon's head (fig. 122). In the oldest basket, a small low bowl, slightly choke-mouthed, this symbol is the dominant design and is repeated in two circles around the circumference. The basket was by far the most precious one remaining in the tribe, and when brought from its hiding place was full of large stone beads and long cylinders of the old-time shell wampum. The owner told me that in making ready for dances and other ceremonies the women of her clan used to paint the *Yi'-yil* bars on their cheeks.

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